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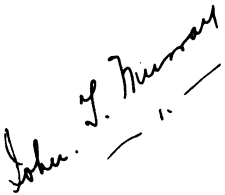

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# VOLUME THREE

# THE POETS

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# LORD BYRON

BY

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LORD BYRON.

# LORD BYRON

GOETHE, in one of his conversations with Henry Crabb Robinson about Byron, said "There is no padding in his poetry" (Es sind keine Flickwörter im Gedichte"). This was in 1829, five years after Byron died. "This, and indeed every evening, I believe, Lord Byron was the subject of his praise. He compared the brilliancy and clearness of his style to a metal wire drawn through a steel plate." He expressed regret that Byron should not have lived to execute his vocation, which he said was "to dramatize the Old Testament. What a subject under his hands would the Tower of Babel have been!" Byron's views of nature he declared were "equally profound and poetical." Power in all its forms Goethe

had respect for, and he was captivated by the indomitable spirit of Manfred. He enjoyed the 'Vision of Judgment' when it was read to him, exclaiming "Heavenly!" "Unsurpassable!" "Byron has surpassed himself." He equally enjoyed the satire on George IV. He did not praise Milton with the warmth with which he eulogized Byron, of whom he said that "the like would never come again; he was inimitable."

Goethe's was the Continental opinion, but it was heightened by his conception of "realism"; he held that the poet must be matter-of-fact, and that it was the truth and reality that made writing popular: "It is by the laborious collection of facts that even a poetical view of nature is to be corrected and authenticated." Tennyson was equally careful for scientific accuracy in regard to all the phenomena of nature. Byron had not scientific accuracy, but with his objectivity Goethe sympathized more than with the reflection and introspection of Wordsworth.

Byron was hailed on the Continent as a poet of power, and the judgment of him was not influenced by his disregard of the society conventions of England, nor by his

personal eccentricities, nor because he was not approved by the Tory party and the Tory writers. Perhaps unconsciously — certainly not with the conviction of Shelley — Byron was on the side of the new movement in Europe; the spirit of Rousseau, the unrest of 'Wilhelm Meister,' the revolutionary seething, with its tinge of morbidness and misanthropy, its brilliant dreams of a new humanity, and its reckless destructive theories. In France especially, his influence was profound and lasting. His wit and his lyric fire excused his morbidness and his sentimental posing as a waif, unfriended in a cold and treacherous world of women and men; and his genius made misanthropy and personal recklessness a fashion. The world took his posing seriously and his grievances to heart, sighed with him, copied his dress, tried to imitate his adventures, many of them imaginary, and accepted him as a perturbed storm-tost spirit, representative of an age of agitation.

So he was, but not by consistent hypocritical premeditation; for his pose was not so much of set purpose as in obedience to a false education, an undisciplined temper,

and a changing mind. He was guided by the impulse of the moment. I think it a supportable thesis that every age, every wide and popular movement, finds its supreme expression in a Poet. Byron was the mouthpiece of a certain phase of his time. He expressed it, and the expression remains and is important as a record, like the French Revolution and the battle of Waterloo. Whatever the judgment in history may be of the value to civilization of this eighteenth-century movement extending into the nineteenth, in politics, sociology, literature, with all its recklessness, morbidness, hopefulness, Byron represented it. He was the poet of Revolt. He sounded the note of intemperate, unconsidered defiance in the 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.' This satire was audacious; many of its judgments were unjust; but its wit and poetic vigor announced a new force in English literature, and the appearance of a man who was abundantly able to take care of himself and secure respectful treatment. In moments afterward he expressed regret for it, or for portions of it, and would have liked to soften its personalities. He was always susceptible to kindness, and easily won by the good opinion of even a

declared enemy. He and Moore became life-long friends, and between him and Walter Scott there sprang up a warm friendship, with sincere reciprocal admiration of each other's works. Only on politics and religion did they disagree, but Scott thought Byron's Liberalism not very deep: "It appeared to me," he said, "that the pleasure it afforded him as a vehicle of displaying his wit and satire against individuals in office was at the bottom of this habit of thinking. At heart I would have termed Byron a patrician on principle." Scott shared Goethe's opinion of Byron's genius:—"He wrote from impulse, never for effect, and therefore I have always reckoned Burns and Byron the most genuine poetic geniuses of my time, and of half a century before me. We have many men of high poetic talents, but none of that ever-gushing and perennial fountain of natural waters." It has been a fashion of late years to say that both Byron and Scott had gone by; I fancy it is a case of "not lost, but gone before." Among the men satirized in the 'Bards' was Wordsworth. Years after, Byron met him at a dinner, and on his return told his wife that the "one feeling he had for him from the beginning to the end

of the visit was *reverence.*" Yet he never ceased to gird at him in his satires. The truth is, that consistency was never to be expected in Byron. Besides, he inherited none of the qualities needed for an orderly and noble life. He came of a wild and turbulent race.

George Gordon, Lord Byron, the sixth of the name, was born in London, January 22d, 1788, and died at Missolonghi, Greece, April 19th, 1824. His father, John Byron, a captain in the Guards, was a heartless profligate with no redeeming traits of character. He eloped with Amelia D'Arcy, wife of the Marquis of Carmarthen, and after her divorce from her husband married her and treated her like a brute. One daughter of this union was Augusta, Byron's half-sister, who married Colonel Leigh, and who was the good angel of the poet, and the friend of Lady Byron until there was a rupture of their relations in 1830 on a matter of business. A year after the death of his first wife, John Byron entrapped and married Catherine Gordon of Gicht, — a Scotch heiress, very proud of her descent from James I., of Scotland, — whose estate he speedily squandered. In less than two

years after the birth of George, John Byron ran away from his wife and his creditors, and died in France.

Mrs. Byron was a wholly undisciplined and weak woman, proud of her descent, wayward and hysterical. She ruined the child, whom she alternately petted and abused. She interfered with his education and fixed him in all his bad tendencies. He never learned anything until he was sent away from her to Harrow. He was passionate, sullen, defiant of authority, but very amenable to kindness; and with a different mother his nobler qualities, generosity, sense of justice, hatred of hypocrisy, and craving for friendship would have been developed, and the story of his life would be very different from what it is. There is no doubt that the regrettable parts of the careers of both Byron and Shelley are due to lack of discipline and loving-kindness in their early years. Byron's irritability and bad temper were aggravated by a physical defect, which hindered him from excelling in athletic sports, of which he was fond, and embittered all his life. Either at birth or by an accident one of his feet was malformed or twisted so as to affect his gait, and the

skill, had it not been for the slashing criticism on it, imputed to Lord Brougham, in the Edinburgh Review, which provoked the 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.' This witty outburst had instant success with the public.

In 1809 Byron came of age, and went abroad on a two-years' pilgrimage to Spain, Malta, Greece, and Constantinople, giving free rein to his humor for intrigue and adventure in the "lands of the sun," and gathering the material for many of his romances and poems. He became at once the picturesque figure of his day,—a handsome, willful poet, sated with life, with no regret for leaving his native land; the conqueror of hearts and the sport of destiny. The world was speedily full of romances of his recklessness, his intrigues, his *diablerie*, and his munificence. These grew, upon his return in 1811 and the publication in 1812 of the first two cantos of 'Childe Harold.' All London was at his feet. He had already made his first speech in the House of Lords espousing the Liberal side. The second speech was in favor of Catholic emancipation. The fresh and novel poem, which Byron himself had not at first

thought worth offering a publisher, fell in with the humor and moral state of the town. It was then that he made the oft-quoted remark, «I awoke one morning and found myself famous.» The poem gave new impetus to the stories of his romantic life, and London seemed to idolize him as much for his follies and his *liaisons* as for his genius. He plunged into all the dissipation of the city. But this period from 1811 to 1815 was also one of extraordinary intellectual fertility. In rapid succession he gave to the press poems and romances, —'The Giaour,' 'The Bride of Abydos,' 'The Corsair,' 'Lara,' the 'Hebrew Melodies,' 'The Siege of Corinth,' and 'Parisina.' Some of the 'Hebrew Melodies' are unequaled in lyric fire. The romances are all taking narratives, full of Oriental passion, vivid descriptions of scenery, and portraitures of female loveliness and dark-browed heroes, often full of melody, but melodramatic; and in substance do not bear analysis. But they still impress with their flow of vitality, their directness and power of versification, and their frequent beauty.

Sated with varied dissipation, worn out with the flighty adoration of Lady Caroline

Lamb, and urged by his friends to marry and settle down, Byron married (January 2d, 1815) Anne Isabella, daughter of Sir Ralph Milbanke. He liked but did not love her; and she was no doubt fascinated by the reputation of the most famous man in Europe, and perhaps indulged the philanthropic hope that she could reform the literary Corsair. On the 10th of December was born Augusta Ada, the daughter whom Byron celebrates in his verse and to whom he was always tenderly attached. On the 15th of January, five weeks after her daughter's birth, Lady Byron left home with the child to pay a visit to her family, dispatching to her husband a playfully tender letter. Shortly after, he was informed by her father and by herself that she did not intend ever to return to him. It is useless to enter into the controversy as to the cause of this separation. In the light of the latest revelations, the better opinion seems to be that it was a hopeless incongruity that might have been predicted from the characters of the two. It seems that Lady Byron was not quite so amiable as she was supposed to be, and in her later years she was subject to hallucinations.

Byron, it must be admitted, was an impossible husband for any woman, most of all for any woman who cared for the social conventions. This affair brought down upon Byron a storm of public indignation which drove him from England. The society which had petted him and excused his vagaries and violations of all decency, now turned upon him with rage and made the idol responsible for the foolishness of his worshipers. To the end of his life neither society nor the critics ever forgave him, and did not even do justice to his genius. His espousal of the popular cause in Europe embittered the conservative element, and the freedom of speculation in such masterly works as 'Cain' brought upon him the anathemas of orthodox England. Henceforth in England his poetry was judged by his liberal and unorthodox opinions. This vituperation rose to its height when Byron dared to satirize George III., and to expose mercilessly in 'Don Juan' the hypocrisy of English life.

On the 25th of April, 1816, Byron left England, never to return. And then opened the most brilliant period of his literary career. Instead of being crushed by the situ-

ation, Byron's warlike spirit responded to it with defiance, and his suffering and his anger invoked the highest qualities of his extraordinary genius. His career in Italy was as wild and dissipated as ever. Strange to say, the best influence in his irregular life was the Countess Guiccioli, who persuaded him at one time to lay aside the composition of 'Don Juan,' and in whose society he was drawn into ardent sympathy with the Italian liberals. For the cause of Italian unity he did much when it was in its darkest period, and his name is properly linked in this great achievement with those of Mazzini and Cavour. It was in Switzerland, before Byron settled in Venice, that he met Shelley, with whom he was thereafter to be on terms of closest intimacy. Each had a mutual regard for the genius of the other, but Shelley placed Byron far above himself. It was while sojourning near the Shelleys on the Lake of Geneva that Byron formed a union with Claire Clairmont, the daughter of Mrs. Clairmont, who became William Godwin's second wife. The result of this intimacy was a natural daughter, Allegra, for whose maintenance and education Byron provided, and

whose early death was severely felt by him.

Byron's life in Italy from 1816 to 1823 continued to be a romance of exciting and dubious adventure. Many details of it are given in Byron's letters,—his prose is always as vigorous as his poetry, and as self-revealing,—and it was no doubt recorded in his famous Diary, which was intrusted to his friend Tom Moore, and was burned after Byron's death. Byron's own frankness about himself, his love of mystification, his impulsiveness in writing anything that entered his brain at the moment, and his habit of boasting about his wickedness, which always went to the extent of making himself out worse than he was, stands in the way of getting a clear narration of his life and conduct. But he was always an interesting and commanding and perplexing personality, and the writings about him by his intimates are as various as the moods he indulged in. The bright light of inquiry always shone upon him, for Byron was the most brilliant, the most famous, the most detested, the most worshiped, and the most criticized and condemned man in Europe.

It was in this period that he produced the works that by their innate vigor and power placed him in the front rank of English poets. A complete list of them cannot be given in this brief notice. The third and fourth cantos of 'Childe Harold' attained a height that the first two cantos had not prepared the world to expect. 'Cain' was perhaps the culmination of his power. The lyrics and occasional poems of this time add to his fame because they exhibit his infinite variety. Critics point out the carelessness of his verse,— and there is an air of haste in much of it; they deny his originality and give the sources of his inspiration,— but he had Shakespeare's faculty of transforming all things to his own will; and they deny him the contribution of thought to the ideas of the world. This criticism must stand against the fact of his almost unequaled power to move the world and make it feel and think. The Continental critics did not accuse him of want of substance. What did he not do for Spain, for Italy, for Greece! No interpretation of their splendid past, of their hope for the future, no musings over the names of other civilizations, no sympathy with national pride,

has ever so satisfied the traveling and reading world in these lands, as Byron's. The public is not so good a judge of what poetry should be as the trained critics; but it is a judge of power, of what is stirring and entertaining: and so it comes to pass that Byron's work is read when much poetry, more finished but wanting certain vital qualities, is neglected. I believe it is a fact that Byron is more quoted than any English poet except Pope since Shakespeare, and that he is better known to the world at large than any except the Master. But whether this is so or not, he is more read now at the close of this century than he was in its third quarter.

'The Dream' and 'Darkness' are poems that will never lose their value so long as men love and are capable of feeling terror. 'Manfred,' 'Mazeppa,' 'Heaven and Earth,' 'The Prisoner of Chillon,' and the satire of the 'Vision of Judgment' maintain their prominence; and it seems certain that many of the lyrics, like 'The Isles of Greece' and the 'Maid of Athens,' will never pall upon any generation of readers, and the lyrics will probably outlast the others in general favor. Byron wrote many dramas,

but they are not acting plays. He lacked the dramatic instinct, and it is safe to say that his plays, except in certain passages, add little to his great reputation.

In the opinion of many critics, Byron's genius was more fully displayed in 'Don Juan' than in 'Childe Harold.' Byron was Don Juan, mocking, satirical, witty, pathetic, dissolute, defiant of all conventional opinion. The ease, the grace, the *diablerie* of the poem are indescribable; its wantonness is not to be excused. But it is a microcosm of life as the poet saw it, a record of the experience of thirty years, full of gems, full of flaws, in many ways the most wonderful performance of his time. The critics who were offended by its satire of English hypocrisy had no difficulty in deciding that it was not fit for English readers. I wonder what would be the judgment of it if it were a recovered classic disassociated from the personality of any writer.

Byron was an aristocrat, and sometimes exhibited a silly regard for his rank; but he was a democrat in all the impulses of his nature. His early feeling was that as a peer he condescended to authorship, and

for a time he would take no pay for what he wrote. But later, when he needed money, he was keen at a bargain for his poetry. He was extravagant in his living, generous to his friends and to the popular causes he espoused, and cared nothing for money except the pleasure of spending it. It was while he was living at Ravenna that he became involved in the intrigues for Italian independence. He threw himself, his fortune and his time, into it. The time has come, he said, when a man must do something — writing was only a pastime. He joined the secret society of the Carbonari; he showed a statesmanlike comprehension of the situation; his political papers bear the stamp of the qualities of vision and leadership. When that dream faded under the reality of the armies of despotism, his thoughts turned to Greece. Partly his restless nature, partly love of adventure carried him there; but once in the enterprise, he gave his soul to it with a boldness, a perseverance, a good sense, a patriotic fervor that earn for him the title of a hero in a good cause. His European name was a tower of strength to the Greek patriots. He mastered the situation with a states-

man's skill and with the perception of a soldier; he endured all the hardships of campaigning, and waited in patience to bring some order to the wrangling factions. If his life had been spared, it is possible that the Greeks then might have thrown off the Turkish yoke; but he succumbed to a malarial fever, brought on by the exposure of a frame weakened by a vegetable diet, and expired at Missolonghi in his thirty-seventh year. He was adored by the Greeks, and his death was a national calamity. This last appearance of Lord Byron shows that he was capable of as great things in action as in the realm of literature. It was the tragic end of the stormy career of a genius whose life was as full of contradictions as his character.

It was not only in Greece that Byron's death was profoundly felt, but in all Europe, which was under the spell of his genius. Mrs. Anne Thackeray Ritchie, in her charming recollections of Tennyson, says:—"One day the news came to the village—the dire news which spread across the land, filling men's hearts with consternation—that Byron was dead. Alfred was then a boy about

fifteen. 'Byron was dead! I thought the whole world was at an end,' he once said, speaking of those bygone days. 'I thought everything was over and finished for every one—that nothing else mattered. I remember I walked out alone and carved "Byron is dead" into the sandstone.'"

# DANTE

BY

CHARLES ELIOT NORTON

DANTE.

# DANTE

I

TO ACQUIRE a love for the best poetry, and a just understanding of it, is the chief end of the study of literature; for it is by means of poetry that the imagination is quickened, nurtured, and invigorated, and it is only through the exercise of his imagination that man can live a life that is in a true sense worth living. For it is the imagination which lifts him from the petty, transient, and physical interests that engross the greater part of his time and thoughts in self-regarding pursuits, to the large, permanent, and spiritual interests that ennoble his nature, and transform him from a solitary individual into a member of the brotherhood of the human race.

In the poet the imagination works more powerfully and consistently than in other men, and thus qualifies him to become the teacher and inspirer of his fellows. He sees men, by its means, more clearly than they see themselves; he discloses them to themselves, and reveals to them their own dim ideals. He becomes the interpreter of his age to itself; and not merely of his own age is he the interpreter, but of man to man in all ages. For change as the world may in outward aspect, with the rise and fall of empires,—change as men may, from generation to generation, in knowledge, belief, and manners,—human nature remains unalterable in its elements, unchanged from age to age; and it is human nature, under its various guises, with which the great poets deal.

The Iliad and the Odyssey do not become antiquated to us. The characters of Shakespeare are perpetually modern. Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, stand alone in the closeness of their relation to nature. Each after his own manner gives us a view of life, as seen by the poetic imagination, such as no other poet has given to us. Homer, first of all poets, shows us individual personages

sharply defined, but in the early stages of intellectual and moral development, the first representatives of the race at its conscious entrance upon the path of progress, with simple motives, simple theories of existence, simple and limited experience. He is plain and direct in the presentation of life, and in the substance no less than in the expression of his thought.

In Shakespeare's work the individual man is no less sharply defined, no less true to nature, but the long procession of his personages is wholly different in effect from that of the Iliad and the Odyssey. They have lost the simplicity of the older race; they are the products of a longer and more varied experience; they have become more complex. And Shakespeare is plain and direct neither in the substance of his thought nor in the expression of it. The world has grown older, and in the evolution of his nature man has become conscious of the irreconcilable paradoxes of life, and more or less aware that while he is infinite in faculty, he is also the quintessence of dust. But there is one essential characteristic in which Shakespeare and Homer resemble each other as poets,—that they both show to us the

scene of life without the interference of their own personality. Each simply holds the mirror up to nature, and lets us see the reflection, without making comment on the show. If there be a lesson in it we must learn it for ourselves.

Dante comes between the two, and differs more widely from each of them than they from one another. They are primarily poets. He is primarily a moralist who is also a poet. Of Homer the man, and of Shakespeare the man, we know, and need to know, nothing; it is only with them as poets that we are concerned. But it is needful to know Dante as man, in order fully to appreciate him as poet. He gives us his world not as reflection from an unconscious and indifferent mirror, but as from a mirror that shapes and orders its reflections for a definite end beyond that of art, and extraneous to it. And in this lies the secret of Dante's hold upon so many and so various minds. He is the chief poet of man as a moral being.

To understand aright the work of any great poet we must know the conditions of his times; but this is not enough in the case of Dante. We must know not only

the conditions of the generation to which he belonged, we must also know the specific conditions which shaped him into the man he was, and differentiated him from his fellows. How came he, endowed with a poetic imagination which puts him in the same class with Homer and Shakespeare, not to be content, like them, to give us a simple view of the phantasmagoria of life, but eager to use the fleeting images as instruments by which to enforce the lesson of righteousness, to set forth a theory of existence and a scheme of the universe?

The question cannot be answered without a consideration of the change wrought in the life and thoughts of men in Europe by the Christian doctrine as expounded and enforced by the Roman Church, and of the simultaneous changes in outward conditions resulting from the destruction of the ancient civilization, and the slow evolution of the modern world as it rose from the ruins of the old. The period which immediately preceded and followed the fall of the Roman Empire, was too disorderly, confused, and broken for men during its course to be conscious of the directions in which they were treading. Century after

century passed without settled institutions, without orderly language, without literature, without art. But institutions, languages, literature and art were germinating, and before the end of the eleventh century clear signs of a new civilization were manifest in Western Europe. The nations, distinguished by differences of race and history, were settling down within definite geographical limits; the various languages were shaping themselves for the uses of intercourse and of literature; institutions accommodated to actual needs were growing strong; here and there the social order was becoming comparatively tranquil and secure. Progress once begun became rapid, and the twelfth century is one of the most splendid periods of the intellectual life of man expressing itself in an infinite variety of noble and attractive forms. These new conditions were most strongly marked in France: in Provence at the South, and in and around the Île de France at the North; and from both these regions a quickening influence diffused itself eastward into Italy.

The conditions of Italy throughout the Dark and Middle Ages were widely differ-

ent from those of other parts of Europe. Through all the ruin and confusion of these centuries a tradition of ancient culture and ancient power was handed down from generation to generation, strongly affecting the imagination of the Italian people, whether recent invaders or descendants of the old population. Italy had never had a national unity and life, and the divisions of her different regions remained as wide in the later as in the earlier times; but there was one sentiment which bound all her various and conflicting elements in a common bond, which touched every Italian heart and roused every Italian imagination,— the sentiment of the imperial grandeur and authority of Rome. Shrunken, feeble, fallen, as the city was, the thought of what she had once been still occupied the fancy of the Italian people, determined their conceptions of the government of the world, and quickened within them a glow of patriotic pride. Her laws were still the main fount of whatsoever law existed for the maintenance of public and private right; the imperial dignity, however interrupted in transmission, however often assumed by foreign and barbarian conquerors, was still, to the imagination,

supreme above all other earthly titles; the story of Roman deeds was known of all men; the legends of Roman heroes were the familiar tales of infancy and age. Cities that had risen since Rome fell claimed, with pardonable falsehood, to have had their origin from her, and their rulers adopted the designations of her consuls and her senators. The fragments of her literature that had survived the destruction of her culture were the models for the rude writers of ignorant centuries, and her language formed the basis for the new language which was gradually shaping itself in accordance with the slowly growing needs of expression. The traces of her material dominion, the ruins of her wide arch of empire, were still to be found from the far West to the farther East, and were but the types and emblems of her moral dominion in the law, the language, the customs, the traditions of the different lands. Nothing in the whole course of profane history has so affected the imaginations of men, or so influenced their destinies, as the achievements and authority of Rome.

The Roman Church inherited, together with the city, the tradition of Roman dominion over the world. Ancient Rome

largely shaped modern Christianity,—by the transmission of the idea of the authority which the Empire once exerted to the Church which grew up upon its ruins. The tremendous drama of Roman history displayed itself to the imagination from scene to scene, from act to act, with completeness of poetic progress and climax,—first the growth, the extension, the absoluteness of material supremacy, the heathen being made the instruments of Divine power for preparing the world for the revelation of the true God; then the tragedy of Christ's death wrought by Roman hands, and the expiation of it in the fall of the Roman imperial power; followed by the new era in which Rome again was asserting herself as mistress of the world, but now with spiritual instead of material supremacy, and with a dominion against which the gates of hell itself should not prevail.

It was, indeed, not at once that this conception of the Church as the inheritor of the rights of Rome to the obedience of mankind took form. It grew slowly and against opposition. But at the end of the eleventh century, through the genius of Pope Gregory VII., the ideas hitherto dis-

puted, of the supreme authority of the Pope within the Church and of the supremacy of the Church over the State, were established as the accepted ecclesiastical theory, and adopted as the basis of the definitely organized ecclesiastical system. Little more than a hundred years later, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, Innocent III. enforced the claims of the Church with a vigor and ability hardly less than that of his great predecessor, maintaining openly that the Pope,— Pontifex Maximus —was the vicar of God upon earth.

This theory was the logical conclusion from a long series of historic premises; and resting upon a firm foundation of dogma, it was supported by the genuine belief, no less than by the worldly interests and ambitions, of those who profited by it. The ideal it presented was at once a simple and a noble conception,—narrow indeed, for the ignorance of men was such that only narrow conceptions, in matters relating to the nature and destiny of man and the order of the universe, were possible. But it was a theory that offered an apparently sufficient solution of the mysteries of religion, of the relation between God and

man, between the visible creation and the unseen world. It was a theory of a material rather than a spiritual order: it reduced the things of the spirit into terms of the things of the flesh. It was crude, it was easily comprehensible, it was fitted to the mental conditions of the age.

The power which the Church claimed, and which to a large degree it exercised over the imagination and over the conduct of the Middle Ages, was the power which belonged to its head as the earthly representative and vicegerent of God. No wonder that such power was often abused, and that the corruption among the ministers of the Church was wide-spread. Yet in spite of abuse, in spite of corruption, the Church was the ark of civilization.

The religious — no less than the intellectual — life of Europe had revived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and had displayed its fervor in the marvels of Crusades and of church-building, — external modes of manifesting zeal for the glory of God, and ardor for personal salvation. But with the progress of intelligence the spirit which had found its expression in these modes of service, now, in the thirteenth century in Italy,

fired the hearts of men with an even more intense and far more vital flame, quickening within them sympathies which had long lain dormant, and which now at last burst into activity in afforts and sacrifices for the relief of misery, and for the bringing of all men within the fold of Christian brotherhood. St. Francis and St. Dominic, in founding their orders, and in setting an example to their brethren, only gave measure and direction to a common impulse.

Yet such were the general hardness of heart and cruelty of temper which had resulted from the centuries of violence, oppression, and suffering, out of which Italy with the rest of Europe was slowly emerging, that the strivings of religious emotion and the efforts of humane sympathy were less powerful to bring about an improvement in social order than influences which had their root in material conditions. Chief among these was the increasing strength of the civic communities, through the development of industry and of commerce. The people of the cities, united for the protection of their common interests, were gaining a sense of power. The little people, as they were called,—mechanics, tradesmen, and

the like,—were organizing themselves, and growing strong enough to compel the great to submit to the restrictions of a more or less orderly and peaceful life. In spite of the violent contentions of the great, in spite of frequent civic uproar, of war with neighbors, of impassioned party disputes, in spite of incessant interruptions of their tranquillity, many of the cities of Italy were advancing in prosperity and wealth. No one of them made more rapid and steady progress than Florence.

The history of Florence during the thirteenth century is a splendid tale of civic energy and resolute self-confidence. The little city was full of eager and vigorous life. Her story abounds in picturesque incident. She had her experience of the turn of the wheel of Fortune, being now at the summit of power in Tuscany, now in the depths of defeat and humiliation.

The spiritual emotion, the improvement in the conditions of society, the increase of wealth, the growth in power of the cities of Italy, were naturally accompanied by a corresponding intellectual development, and the thirteenth century became for Italy what the twelfth had been for France, a

period of splendid activity in the expression of her new life. Every mode of expression in literature and in the arts was sought and practiced, at first with feeble and ignorant hands, but with steady gain of mastery. At the beginning of the century the language was a mere spoken tongue, not yet shaped for literary use. But the example of Provence was strongly felt at the court of the Emperor Frederick II. in Sicily, and the first half of the century was not ended before many poets were imitating in the Italian tongue the poems of the troubadours. Form and substance were alike copied; there is scarcely a single original note; but the practice was of service in giving suppleness to the language, in forming it for nobler uses, and in opening the way for poetry which should be Italian in sentiment as well as in words. At the north of Italy the influence of the trouvères was felt in like manner. Everywhere the desire for expression was manifest. The spring had come, the young birds had begun to twitter, but no full song was yet heard. Love was the main theme of the poets, but it had few accents of sincerity; the common tone was artificial, was unreal.

In the second half of the century new voices are heard, with accents of genuine and natural feeling; the poets begin to treat the old themes with more freshness, and to deal with religion, politics, and morals, as well as with love. The language still possesses, indeed, the quality of youth; it is still pliant, its forms have not become stiffened by age, it is fit for larger use than has yet been made of it, and lies ready and waiting, like a noble instrument, for the hand of the master which shall draw from it its full harmonies and reveal its latent power in the service he exacts from it.

But it was not in poetry alone that the life of Italy found expression. Before the invention of printing,—which gave to the literary arts such an advantage as secured their pre-eminence,—architecture, sculpture, and painting were hardly less important means for the expression of the ideals of the imagination and the creative energy of man. The practice of them had never wholly ceased in Italy; but her native artists had lost the traditions of technical skill; their work was rude and childish. The conventional and lifeless forms of Byzantine art in its decline were adopted by

workmen who no longer felt the impulse, and no longer possessed the capacity, of original design. Venice and Pisa, early enriched by Eastern commerce, and with citizens both instructed and inspired by knowledge of foreign lands, had begun great works of building even in the eleventh century; but these works had been designed, and mainly executed, by masters from abroad. But now the awakened soul of Italy breathed new life into all the arts in its efforts at self-expression. A splendid revival began. The inspiring influence of France was felt in the arts of construction and design as it had been felt in poetry. The magnificent display of the highest powers of the imagination and the intelligence in France, the creation during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries of the unrivaled productions of Gothic art, stimulated and quickened the growth of the native art of Italy. But the French forms were seldom adopted for direct imitation, as the forms of Provençal poetry had been. The power of classic tradition was strong enough to resist their attraction. The taste of Italy rejected the marvels of Gothic design in favor of modes of

expression inherited from her own past, but vivified with fresh spirit, and adapted to her new requirements. The inland cities, as they grew rich through native industry and powerful through the organization of their citizens, were stirred with rivalry to make themselves beautiful, and the motives of religion no less than those of civic pride contributed to their adornment. The Church was the object of interest common to all. Piety, superstition, pride, emulation, all alike called for art in which their spirit should be embodied. The imagination answered to the call. The eyes of the artist were once more opened to see the beauty of life, and his hand sought to reproduce it. The bonds of tradition were broken. The Greek marble vase on the platform of the Duomo at Pisa taught Niccola Pisano the right methods of sculpture, and directed him to the source of his art in the study of nature. His work was a new wonder and delight, and showed the way along which many followed him. Painting took her lesson from sculpture, and before the end of the century both arts had become responsive to the demand of the time, and had entered upon that course

of triumph which was not to end till, three centuries later, chisel and brush dropped from hands enfeebled in the general decline of national vigor, and incapable of resistance to the tyrannous and exclusive autocracy of the printed page.

But it was not only the new birth of sentiment and emotion which quickened these arts: it was also the aroused curiosity of men concerning themselves, their history, and the earth. They felt their own ignorance. The vast region of the unknown, which encircled with its immeasurable spaces the little tract of the known world, appealed to their fancy and their spirit of enterprise, with its boundless promise and its innumerable allurements to adventure. Learning, long confined and starved in the cell of the monk, was coming out into the open world, and was gathering fresh stores alike from the past and the present. The treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of the Greeks were eagerly sought, especially in translations of Aristotle, — translations which, though imperfect indeed, and disfigured by numberless misinterpretations and mistakes, nevertheless contain a body of instruction invaluable

as a guide and stimulant to the awakened intelligence. Encyclopedic compends of knowledge put at the disposition of students all that was known or fancied in the various fields of science. The division between knowledge and belief was not sharply drawn, and the wonders of legend and of fable were accepted with as ready a faith as the actual facts of observation and of experience. Travelers for gain or for adventure, and missionaries for the sake of religion, were venturing to lands hitherto unvisited. The growth of knowledge, small as it was compared with later increase, widened thought and deepened life. The increase of thought strengthened the faculties of the mind. Man becomes more truly man in proportion to what he knows, and one of the most striking and characteristic features of this great century is the advance of man through increase of knowledge out of childishness towards maturity. The insoluble problems which had been discussed with astonishing acuteness by the schoolmen of the preceding generation were giving place to a philosophy of more immediate application to the conduct and discipline of life. The 'Summa Theologica'

of St. Thomas Aquinas not only treated with incomparable logic the vexed questions of scholastic philosophy, but brought all the resources of a noble and well-trained intelligence and of a fine moral sense to the study and determination of the order and government of the universe, and of the nature and destiny of man.

The scope of learning remained, indeed, at the end of the century, narrow in its range. The little tract of truth which men had acquired lay encompassed by ignorance, like a scant garden-plot surrounded by a high wall. But here and there the wall was broken through, and paths were leading out into wider fields to be won for culture, or into deserts wider still, in which the wanderers should perish.

But as yet there was no comprehensive and philosophic grasp of the new conditions in their total significance; no harmonizing of their various elements into one consistent scheme of human life; no criticism of the new life as a whole. For this task was required not only acquaintance with the whole range of existing knowledge, by which the conceptions of men in regard to themselves and the universe were de-

termined, but also a profound view of the meaning of life itself, and an imaginative insight into the nature of man. A mere image of the drama of life as presented to the eye would not suffice. The meaning of it would be lost in the confusion and multiplicity of the scene. The only possible explanation and reconcilement of its aspects lay in the universal application to them of the moral law, and in the exhibition of man as a spiritual and immortal being for whom this world was but the first stage of existence. This was the task undertaken and accomplished by Dante.

II

Of the events in Dante's life few are precisely ascertained, but of its general course enough is known, either from his own statements or from external testimony, to show the essential relations between his life and his work, and the influence of his experience upon his convictions and character. Most of the biographies of him are untrustworthy, being largely built up upon a foundation of inferences and suppositions, and often filled out with traditions and stories of which the

greater part are certainly false and few have a likelihood of truth. The only strictly contemporary account of him is that given by the excellent Chronicler of Florence, Giovanni Villani, a man of weight and judgment, who in the ninth book of his Chronicle, under the year 1321, recording Dante's death, adds a brief narrative of his life and works; because, as he says, "on account of the virtues and knowledge and worth of so great a citizen, it seems to us to be fitting to give a perpetual memorial of him in this our chronicle, although the noble works left by him in writing afford a true testimonial to him, and honorable fame to our city." "Dante was," says Villani, "an honorable and ancient citizen of Florence, of the gate of San Piero, and our neighbor." "He was a great master in almost every branch of knowledge, although he was a layman; he was a supreme poet and philosopher, and a perfect rhetorician alike in prose and verse, as well as a most noble orator in public speech, supreme in rhyme, with the most polished and beautiful style that had ever been in our language. . . . Because of his knowledge he was somewhat presumptuous, disdainful and haughty; and, as it

were after the manner of a philosopher, having little graciousness, he knew not well to bear himself with common people (*conversare con laici*)."

Dante was born in Florence, in May or June 1265. Of his family little is positively known.* It was not among the nobles of the city, but it had place among the well-to-do citizens who formed the body of the State and the main support of the Guelf party. Of Dante's early years, and the course of his education, nothing is known save what he himself tells us in his various writings or what may be inferred from them. Lionardo Bruni, eminent as an historian and as a public man, who wrote a Life of Dante about a hundred years after his death, cites a letter of which we have no other knowledge, in which, if the letter be genuine, the poet says that he took part in the battle of Campaldino, fought in June 1289. The words are:—"At the battle of Campaldino, in which the Ghibelline party was almost all slain and undone, I found myself not a

* In the 'Paradiso' (canto xv.) he introduces his great-great-grandfather Cacciaguida, who tells of himself that he followed the Emperor Conrad to fight against the Mohammedans, was made a knight by him, and was slain in the war.

child in arms, and I experienced great fear, and finally the greatest joy, because of the shifting fortunes of the fight.» It seems likely that Dante was present, probably under arms, in the latter part of the same summer, at the surrender to the Florentines of the Pisan stronghold of Caprona, where, he says ('Inferno,' xxi. 94–96), «I saw the foot soldiers afraid, who came out under compact from Caprona, seeing themselves among so many enemies.»

Years passed before any other event in Dante's life is noted with a certain date. An imperfect record preserved in the Florentine archives mentions his taking part in a discussion in the so-called Council of a Hundred Men, on the 5th of June, 1296. This is of importance as indicating that he had before this time become a member of one of the twelve Arts,—enrollment in one of which was required for the acquisition of the right to exercise political functions in the State,—and also as indicating that he had a place in the chief of those councils by which public measures were discussed and decided. The Art of which he was a member was that of the physicians and druggists (*medici e speziali*), an Art whose

dealings included commerce in many of the products of the East.

Not far from this time, but whether before or after 1296 is uncertain, he married. His wife was Gemma dei Donati. The Donati were a powerful family among the *grandi* of the city, and played a leading part in the stormy life of Florence. Of Gemma nothing is known but her marriage.

Between 1297 and 1299, Dante, together with his brother Francesco, as appears from existing documentary evidence, were borrowers of considerable sums of money; and the largest of the debts thus incurred seem not to have been discharged till 1332, eleven years after his death, when they were paid by his sons Jacopo and Pietro.

In May 1299 he was sent as envoy from Florence to the little, not very distant, city of San Gemignano, to urge its community to take part in a general council of the Guelf communes of Tuscany.

In the next year, 1300, he was elected one of the six priors of Florence, to hold office from the 15th of June to the 15th of August. The priors, together with the "gonfalonier of justice" (who had command of the body of one thousand men who stood at

their service), formed the chief magistracy of the city. Florence had such jealousy of its rulers that the priors held office but two months, so that in the course of each year thirty-six of the citizens were elected to this magistracy. The outgoing priors, associated with twelve of the leading citizens, two from each of the *sestieri* or wards of the city, chose their successors. Neither continuity nor steady vigor of policy was possible with an administration so shifting and of such varied composition, which by its very constitution was exposed at all times to intrigue and to attack. It was no wonder that Florence lay open to the reproach that her counsels were such that what she spun in October did not reach to mid-November ('Purgatory,' vi. 142–144). His election to the priorate was the most important event in Dante's public life. "All my ills and all my troubles," he declared, "had occasion and beginning from my misfortunate election to the priorate, of which, though I was not worthy in respect of wisdom, yet I was not unworthy in fidelity and in age."*

* From the letter already referred to, cited by Lionardo Bruni.

The year 1300 was disastrous not only for Dante, but for Florence. She was, at the end of the thirteenth century, by far the most flourishing and powerful city of Tuscany, full of vitality and energy, and beautiful as she was strong. She was not free from civil discord, but the predominance of the Guelf party was so complete within her walls that she suffered little from the strife between Guelf and Ghibelline, which for almost a century had divided Italy into two hostile camps. In the main the Guelf party was that of the common people and the industrious classes, and in general it afforded support to the Papacy as against the Empire, while it received, in return, support from the popes. The Ghibellines, on the other hand, were mainly of the noble class, and maintainers of the Empire. The growth of the industry and commerce of Florence in the last half of the century had resulted in the establishment of the popular power, and in the suppression of the Ghibelline interest. But a bitter quarrel broke out in one of the great families in the neighboring Guelf city of Pistoia, a quarrel which raged so furiously that Florence feared that it would result in the gain

of power by the Ghibellines, and she adopted the fatal policy of compelling the heads of the contending factions to take up their residence within her walls. The result was that she herself became the seat of discord. Each of the two factions found ardent adherents, and, adopting the names by which they had been distinguished in Pistoia, Florence was almost instantly ablaze with the passionate quarrel between the Whites and the Blacks (Bianchi and Neri). The flames burned so high that the Pope, Boniface VIII., intervened to quench them. His intervention was vain.

It was just at this time that Dante became prior. The need of action to restore peace to the city was imperative, and the priors took the step of banishing the leaders of both divisions. Among those of the Bianchi was Dante's own nearest friend, Guido Cavalcante. The measure was insufficient to secure tranquillity and order. The city was in constant tumult; its conditions went from bad to worse. But in spite of civil broils, common affairs must still be attended to, and from a document preserved in the Archives at Florence we learn that on the 28th April, 1301, Dante was ap-

pointed superintendent, without salary, of works undertaken for the widening, straightening, and paving of the street of San Procolo, and making it safe for travel. On the 13th of the same month he took part in a discussion, in the Council of the Heads of the twelve greater Arts, as to the mode of procedure in the election of future priors. On the 18th of June, in the Council of the Hundred Men, he advised against providing the Pope with a force of one hundred men which had been asked for; and again in September of the same year there is record, for the last time, of his taking part in the Council, in a discussion in regard "to the conservation of the Ordinances of Justice and the Statutes of the People."

These notices of the part taken by Dante in public affairs seem at first sight comparatively slight and unimportant; but were one constructing an ideal biography of him, it would be hard to devise records more appropriate to the character and principles of the man as they appear from his writings. The sense of the duty of the individual to the community of which he forms a part was one of his strongest convictions; and his being put in charge of the opening

of the street of San Procolo, and making it safe for travel, "eo quod popularis comitatus absque strepitu et briga magnatum et potentum possunt secure venire ad dominos priores et vexilliferum justitiæ cum expedit" (so that the common people may, without uproar and harassing of magnates and mighty men, have access whenever it be desirable to the Lord Priors and the Standard-Bearer of Justice), affords a comment on his own criticism of his fellow-citizens, whose disposition to shirk the burden of public duty is more than once the subject of his satire. "Many refuse the common burden, but thy people, my Florence, eagerly replies without being called on, and cries, 'I load myself'" ('Purgatory,' vi. 133–135). His counsel against providing the Pope with troops was in conformity with his fixed political conviction that the function of the Papacy was to be confined to the spiritual government of mankind; and nothing could be more striking, as a chance incident, than that the last occasion on which he, whose heart was set on justice, took part in the counsels of his city, should have been for the discussion of the means for "the conservation of the

ordinances of justice and the statutes of the people.»

In the course of events in 1300 and 1301 the Bianchi proved the stronger of the two factions by which the city was divided, they resisted with success the efforts of the Pope in support of their rivals, and they were charged by their enemies with intent to restore the rule of the city to the Ghibellines. While affairs were in this state, Charles of Valois, brother to the King of France, Philip the Fair, was passing through Italy with a troop of horsemen to join Charles II. of Naples,* in the attempt to regain Sicily from the hands of Frederic of Aragon. The Pope favored the expedition, and held out flattering promises to Charles. The latter reached Anagni, where Boniface was residing, in September 1301. Here it was arranged that before proceeding to Sicily, Charles should undertake to reduce to obedience the refractory opponents of the Pope in Tuscany. The title of the Pacifier of Tuscany was bestowed on him, and he moved toward Florence with his own troop and a considerable addi-

*Charles II. of Naples was the cousin of Philip III., the Bold, of France, the father of Charles of Valois; and in 1290 Charles of Valois had married his daughter.

tional force of men-at-arms. He was met on his way by deputies from Florence, to whom he made fair promises; and trusting to his good faith, the Florentines opened their gates to him and he entered the city on All Saints' Day (November 1st), 1301.

Charles had hardly established himself in his quarters before he cast his pledges to the wind. The exiled Neri, with his connivance, broke into the city, and for six days worked their will upon their enemies, slaying many of them, pillaging and burning their houses, while Charles looked on with apparent unconcern at the widespread ruin and devastation. New priors, all of them from the party of the Neri, entered upon office in mid-November, and a new Podestà, Cante dei Gabrielli of Agobbio, was charged with the administration of justice. The persecution of the Bianchi was carried on with consistent thoroughness: many were imprisoned, many fined, Charles sharing in the sums exacted from them. On the 27th of January, 1302, a decree was issued by the Podestà condemning five persons, one of whom was Dante, to fine and banishment on account of crimes alleged to have been committed

by them while holding office as priors. "According to public report," said the decree, "they committed barratry, sought illicit gains, and practiced unjust extortions of money or goods." These general charges are set forth with elaborate legal phraseology, and with much repetition of phrase, but without statement of specific instances. The most important of them are that the accused had spent money of the commune in opposing the Pope, in resistance to the coming of Charles of Valois, and against the peace of the city and the Guelf party; that they had promoted discord in the city of Pistoia, and had caused the expulsion from that city of the Neri, the faithful adherents of the Holy Roman Church; and that they had caused Pistoia to break its union with Florence, and to refuse subjection to the Church and to Charles the Pacificator of Tuscany. These being the charges, the decree proceeded to declare that the accused, having been summoned to appear within a fixed time before the Podestà and his court to make their defense, under penalty for non-appearance of five thousand florins each, and having failed to do so, were now condemned to pay this

sum and to restore their illicit gains; and if this were not done within three days from the publication of this sentence against them, all their possessions (*bona*) should be seized and destroyed; and should they make the required payment, they were nevertheless to stand banished from Tuscany for two years; and for perpetual memory of their misdeeds their names were to be inscribed in the Statutes of the People, and as swindlers and barrators they were never to hold office or benefice within the city or district of Florence.

Six weeks later, on the 10th of March, another decree of the Podestà was published, declaring the five citizens named in the preceding decree, together with ten others, to have practically confessed their guilt by their contumacy in non-appearance when summoned, and condemning them, if at any time any one of them should come into the power of Florence, to be burned to death ("talis perveniens igne comburatur sic quod moriatur").*

* These decrees and the other public documents relating to Dante are to be found in various publications. They have all been collected and edited by Professor George R. Carpenter, in the tenth and eleventh Annual Reports of the Dante Society, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1891, 1892.

From this time forth till his death Dante was an exile. The character of the decrees is such that the charges brought against him have no force, and leave no suspicion resting upon his actions as an officer of the State. They are the outcome and expression of the bitterness of party rage, and they testify clearly only to his having been one of the leaders of the parties opposed to the pretensions of the Pope, and desirous to maintain the freedom of Florence from foreign intervention.

In April Charles left Florence, "having finished," says Villani, the eye-witness of these events, "that for which he had come, namely, under pretext of peace, having driven the White party from Florence; but from this proceeded many calamities and dangers to our city."

The course of Dante's external life in exile is hardly less obscure than that of his early days. Much concerning it may be inferred with some degree of probability from passages in his own writings, or from what is reported by others; but of actual certain facts there are few. For a time he seems to have remained with his companions in exile, of whom there were hun-

dreds, but he soon separated himself from them in grave dissatisfaction, making a party by himself ('Paradiso,' xvii. 69), and found shelter at the court of the Scaligeri at Verona. In August 1306 he was among the witnesses to a contract at Padua. In October of the same year he was with Franceschino, Marchese Malespina, in the district called the Lunigiana, and empowered by him as his special procurator and envoy to establish the terms of peace for him and his brothers with the Bishop of Luni. His gratitude to the Malespini for their hospitality and good-will toward him is proved by one of the most splendid compliments ever paid in verse or prose, the magnificent eulogium of this great and powerful house with which the eighth canto of the 'Purgatory' closes. How long Dante remained with the Malespini, and whither he went after leaving them, is unknown. At some period of his exile he was at Lucca ('Purgatorio,' xxiv. 45); Villani states that he was at Bologna, and afterwards at Paris, and in many parts of the world. He wandered far and wide in Italy, and it may well be that in the course of his years of exile he went to Paris, drawn thither by the

opportunities of learning which the University afforded, but nothing is known definitely of his going.

In 1311 the mists which obscure the greater part of Dante's life in exile are dispelled for a moment, by three letters of unquestioned authenticity, and we gain a clear view of the poet. In 1310 Henry of Luxemburg, a man who touched the imagination of his contemporaries by his striking presence and chivalric accomplishments as well as by his high character and generous aims, "a man just, religious, and strenuous in arms," having been elected Emperor, as Henry VII., prepared to enter Italy, with intent to confirm the imperial rights and to restore order to the distracted land. The Pope, Clement V., favored his coming, and the prospect opened by it was hailed not only by the Ghibellines with joy, but by a large part of the Guelfs as well; with the hope that the long discord and confusion, from which all had suffered, might be brought to end, and give place to tranquillity and justice. Dante exulted in this new hope; and on the coming of the Emperor, late in 1310, he addressed an animated appeal to the rulers and people of

Italy exhorting them in impassioned words to rise up and do reverence to him whom the Lord of heaven and earth had ordained for their king. «Behold, now is the accepted time; rejoice, O Italy, dry thy tears; efface, O most beautiful, the traces of mourning; for he is at hand who shall deliver thee.»

The first welcome of Henry was ardent, and with fair auspices he assumed at Milan, in January 1311 the Iron Crown, the crown of the King of Italy. Here at Milan Dante presented himself, and here with full heart he did homage upon his knees to the Emperor. But the popular welcome proved hollow; the illusions of hope speedily began to vanish; revolt broke out in many cities of Lombardy; Florence remained obdurate, and with great preparations for resistance put herself at the head of the enemies of the Emperor. Dante, disappointed and indignant, could not keep silence. He wrote a letter headed «Dante Alaghieri, a Florentine and undeservedly in exile, to the most wicked Florentines within the city.» It begins with calm and eloquent words in regard to the divine foundation of the imperial power, and to the sufferings of Italy due to her having been left without its control to

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ner own undivided will. Then it breaks forth in passionate denunciation of Florence for her impious arrogance in venturing to rise up in mad rebellion against the minister of God; and, warning her of the calamities which her blind obstinacy is preparing for her, it closes with threats of her impending ruin and desolation. This letter is dated from the springs of the Arno, on the 31st of March.

The growing force of the opposition which he encountered delayed the progress of Henry. Dante, impatient of delay, eager to see the accomplishment of his hope, on the 16th of April addressed Henry himself in a letter of exalted prophetic exhortation, full of Biblical language, and of illustrations drawn from sacred and profane story, urging him not to tarry, but trusting in God, to go out to meet and to slay the Goliath that stood against him. "Then the Philistines will flee, and Israel will be delivered, and we, exiles in Babylon, who groan as we remember the holy Jerusalem, shall then, as citizens breathing in peace, recall in joy the miseries of confusion." But all was in vain. The drama which had opened with such brilliant expectations

was advancing to a tragic close. Italy became more confused and distracted than ever. One sad event followed after another. In May the brother of the Emperor fell at the siege of Brescia; in September his dearly loved wife Margarita, "a holy and good woman," died at Genoa. The forces hostile to him grew more and more formidable. He succeeded, however, in entering Rome in May 1312, but his enemies held half of the city, and the streets became the scene of bloody battles; St. Peter's was closed to him, and Henry, worn and disheartened and in peril, was compelled to submit to be ingloriously crowned at St. John Lateran. With diminished strength and with loss of influence he withdrew to Tuscany, and laid ineffectual siege to Florence. Month after month dragged along with miserable continuance of futile war. In the summer of 1313, collecting all his forces, Henry prepared to move southward against the King of Naples. But he was seized with illness, and on the 24th of August he died at Buonconvento, not far from Siena. With his death died the hope of union and of peace for Italy. His work, undertaken with high purpose and courage,

had wholly failed. He had come to set Italy straight before she was ready ('Paradiso,' xxxi. 137). The clouds darkened over her. For Dante the cup of bitterness overflowed.

How Dante was busied, where he was abiding, during the last two years of Henry's stay in Italy, we have no knowledge. One striking fact relating to him is all that is recorded. In the summer of 1311 the Guelfs in Florence, in order to strengthen themselves against the Emperor, determined to relieve from ban and to recall from exile many of their banished fellow-citizens, confident that on returning home they would strengthen the city in its resistance against the Emperor. But to the general amnesty which was issued on the 2d of September there were large exceptions; and impressive evidence of the multitude of the exiles is afforded by the fact that more than a thousand were expressly excluded from the benefit of pardon, and were to remain banished and condemned as before. In the list of those thus still regarded as enemies of Florence stands the name of Dante.

The death of the Emperor was followed eight months later by that of the Pope,

Clement V., under whom the papal throne had been removed from Rome to Avignon. There seemed a chance, if but feeble, that a new pope might restore the Church to the city which was its proper home, and thus at least one of the wounds of Italy be healed. The Conclave was bitterly divided; month after month went by without a choice, the fate of the Church and of Italy hanging uncertain in the balance. Dante, in whom religion and patriotism combined as a single passion, saw with grief that the return of the Church to Italy was likely to be lost through the selfishness, the jealousies, and the avarice of her chief prelates; and under the impulse of the deepest feeling he addressed a letter of remonstrance, reproach, and exhortation to the Italian cardinals, who formed but a small minority in the Conclave, but who might by union and persistence still secure the election of a pope favorable to the return. This letter is full of a noble but too vehement zeal. «It is for you, being one at heart, to fight manfully for the Bride of Christ; for the seat of the Bride, which is Rome; for our Italy, and in a word, for the whole commonwealth of pilgrims upon earth.» But

words were in vain; and after a struggle kept up for two years and three months, a pope was at last elected who was to fix the seat of the Papacy only the more firmly at Avignon. Once more Dante had to bear the pain of disappointment of hopes in which selfishness had no part.

And now for years he disappears from sight. What his life was he tells in a most touching passage near the beginning of his 'Convito':—"From the time when it pleased the citizens of Florence, the fairest and most famous daughter of Rome, to cast me out from her sweetest bosom (in which I had been born and nourished even to the summit of my life, and in which, at good peace with them, I desire with all my heart to repose my weary soul, and to end the time which is allotted to me), through almost all the regions to which our tongue extends I have gone a pilgrim, almost a beggar, displaying against my will the wound of fortune, which is wont often to be imputed unjustly to [the discredit of] him who is wounded. Truly I have been a bark without sail and without rudder, borne to divers ports and bays and shores by that dry wind which grievous poverty breathes forth, and

I have appeared mean in the eyes of many who perchance, through some report, had imagined me in other form; and not only has my person been lowered in their sight, but every work of mine, whether done or to be done, has been held in less esteem.»

Once more, and for the last time, during these wanderings he heard the voice of Florence addressed to him, and still in anger. A decree was issued* on the 6th of November, 1315, renewing the condemnation and banishment of numerous citizens, denounced as Ghibellines and rebels, including among them Dante Aldighieri and his sons. The persons named in this decree are charged with contumacy, and with the commission of ill deeds against the good state of the Commune of Florence and the Guelf party; and it is ordered that «if any of them shall fall into the power of the Commune he shall be taken to the place of Justice and there be beheaded.» The motive is unknown which led to the inclusion in this decree of the sons of Dante, of

*This decree was pronounced in a General Council of the Commune by the Vicar of King Robert of Naples, into whose hands the Florentines had given themselves in 1313 for a term of five years,—extended afterwards to eight,—with the hope that by his authority order might be preserved within the city.

whom there were two, now youths respectively a little more or a little less than twenty years old.*

It is probable that the last years of Dante's life were passed in Ravenna, under the protection of Guido da Polenta, lord of the city. It was here that he died, on September 14th, 1321. His two sons were with him, and probably also his daughter Beatrice. He was in his fifty-seventh year when he went from suffering and from exile to peace ('Paradiso,' x. 128).

Such are the few absolute facts known concerning the external events of Dante's life. A multitude of statements, often with much circumstantial detail, concerning other incidents, have been made by his biographers; a few rest upon a foundation of probability, but the mass are guess-work. There is no need to report them; for small as the sum of our actual knowledge is, it is enough for defining the field within which his spirit-

*Among the letters ascribed to Dante is one, much noted, in reply to a letter from a friend in Florence, in regard to terms of absolution on which he might secure his re-admission to Florence. It is of very doubtful authenticity. It has no external evidence to support it, and the internal evidence of its rhetorical form and sentimental tone is all against it. It belongs in the same class with the famous letter of Fra Ilario, and like that, seems not unlikely to have been an invention of Boccaccio's.

ual life was enacted, and for showing the conditions under which his work was done, and by which its character was largely determined.

III

No poet has recorded his own inner life more fully or with greater sincerity than Dante. All his more important writings have essentially the character of a spiritual autobiography, extending from his boyhood to his latest years. Their quality and worth as works of literature are largely dependent upon their quality and interest as revelations of the nature of their writer. Their main significance lies in this double character.

The earliest of them is the 'Vita Nuova,' or New Life. It is the narrative in prose and verse of the beginning and course of the love which made life new for him in his youth, and which became the permanent inspiration of his later years, and the bond of union for him between earth and heaven, between the actual and the ideal, between the human and the divine. The little book begins with an account of the boy's first meeting, when he was nine years old, with a little maiden about a year younger, who

so touched his heart that from that time forward Love lorded it over his soul. She was called Beatrice; but whether this was her true name, or whether, because of its significance of blessing, it was assigned to her as appropriate to her nature, is left in doubt. Who her parents were, and what were the events of her life, are also uncertain; though Boccaccio, who, some thirty years after Dante's death, wrote a biography of the poet in which fact and fancy are inextricably intermingled, reports that he had it upon good authority that she was the daughter of Folco Portinari, and became the wife of Simone de' Bardi. So far as Dante's relation to her is concerned, these matters are of no concern. Just nine years after their first meeting, years during which Dante says he had often seen her, and her image had stayed constantly with him, the lady of his love saluted him with such virtue that he seemed to see all the bounds of bliss, and having already recognized in himself the art of discoursing in rhyme, he made a sonnet in which he set forth a vision which had come to him after receiving his lady's salute. This sonnet has a twofold interest, as being the earliest of

Dante's poetic composition preserved to us, and as describing a vision which connects it in motive with the vision of the 'Divine Comedy.' It is the poem of a 'prentice hand not yet master of its craft, and neither in manner nor in conception has it any marked distinction from the work of his predecessors and contemporaries. The narrative of the first incidents of his love forms the subject of the first part of the little book, consisting of ten poems and the prose comment upon them; then the poet takes up a new theme and devotes ten poems to the praise of his lady. The last of them is interrupted by her death, which took place on the 9th of June, 1290, when Dante was twenty-five years old. Then he takes up another new theme, and the next ten poems are devoted to his grief, to an episode of temporary unfaithfulness to the memory of Beatrice, and to the revival of fidelity of love for her. One poem, the last, remains; in which he tells how a sigh, issuing from his heart, and guided by Love, beholds his lady in glory in the empyrean. The book closes with these words:—

"After this sonnet a wonderful vision appeared to me, in which I saw things which made me resolve to speak no

more of this blessed one until I could more worthily treat of her. And to attain to this, I study to the utmost of my power, as she truly knows. So that if it shall please Him through whom all things live that my life be prolonged for some years, I hope to say of her what was never said of any woman. And then, may it please Him who is the Lord of Grace, that my soul may go to behold the glory of its lady, namely of that blessed Beatrice, who in glory looks upon the face of Him *qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus*" (who is blessed forever).

There is nothing in the 'New Life' which indicates whether or not Beatrice was married, or which implies that the devotion of Dante to her was recognized by any special expression of regard on her part. No interviews between them are recorded; no tokens of love were exchanged. The reserve, the simple and unconscious dignity of Beatrice, distinguish her no less than her beauty, her grace, and her ineffable courtesy. The story, based upon actual experience, is ordered not in literal conformity with fact, but according to the ideal of the imagination; and its reality does not consist in the exactness of its record of events, but in the truth of its poetic conception. Under the narrative lies an allegory of the power of love to transfigure earthly things into the likeness of heavenly, and to lift the soul from things material and transitory to things spiritual and eternal.

While the little book exhibits many features of a literature in an early stage of development, and many of the characteristics of a youthful production, it is yet the first book of modern times which has such quality as to possess perpetual contemporaneousness. It has become in part archaic, but it does not become antiquated. It is the first book in a modern tongue in which prose begins to have freedom of structure, and ease of control over the resources of the language. It shows a steady progress in Dante's mastery of literary art. The stiffness and lack of rhythmical charm of the poems with which it begins disappear in the later sonnets and canzoni, and before its close it exhibits the full development of the sweet new style begun by Dante's predecessor Guido Guinicelli, and of which the secret lay in obedience to the dictates of nature within the heart.

The date of its compilation cannot be fixed with precision, but was probably not far from 1295; and the words with which it closes seem to indicate that the design of the 'Divine Comedy' had already taken a more or less definite shape in Dante's mind.

The deepest interest of the 'New Life'

is the evidence which it affords in regard to Dante's character. The tenderness, sensitiveness, and delicacy of feeling, the depth of passion, the purity of soul which are manifest in it, leave no question as to the controlling qualities of his disposition. These qualities rest upon a foundation of manliness, and are buttressed by strong moral principles. At the very beginning of the book is a sentence, which shows that he had already gained that self-control which is the prime condition of strength and worth of character. In speaking of the power which his imagination gave to Love to rule over him, a power that had its source in the image of his lady, he adds, "Yet was that image of such noble virtue that it never suffered Love to rule me without the faithful counsel of the reason in those matters in which to listen to its counsel was useful." His faculties were already disciplined by study, and his gifts enriched with learning. He was scholar hardly less than poet. The range of his acquisitions was already wide, and it is plain that he had had the best instruction which Florence could provide; and nowhere else could better have been found.

The death of Beatrice was the beginning of a new period of Dante's self-development. So long as she lived she had led him along toward the right way. For a time, during the first ecstacy of grief at her loss, she still sustained him. After a while, he tells us, his mind, which was endeavoring to heal itself, sought for comfort in the mode which other comfortless ones had accepted for their consolation. He read Boëthius on the 'Consolations of Philosophy,' and the words of comfort in Cicero's 'Treatise on Friendship.' By these he was led to further studies of philosophy, and giving himself with ardor to its pursuit, he devoted himself to the acquisition of the wisdom of this earth, to the neglect, for a time, of the teachings of Divine revelation. He entered upon paths of study which did not lead to the higher truth, and at the same time he began to take active part himself in the affairs of the world. He was attracted by the allurements of life. He married; he took office. He shared in the pleasures of the day. He no longer listened to the voice of the spirit, nor was faithful to the image of Beatrice in following on earth the way which should lead him to her in heaven. But

meanwhile he wrote verses which under the form of poems of love were celebrations of the beauty of Philosophy; and he was accomplishing himself in learning till he became master of all the erudition of his time; he was meditating deeply on politics, he was studying life even more than books, he was becoming one of the deepest of thinkers and one of the most accomplished of literary artists. But his life was of the world, wordly, and it did not satisfy him. At last a change came. He suddenly awoke to consciousness of how far he had strayed from that good of which Beatrice was the type; how basely he had deserted the true ideals of his youth; how perilous was the life of the world; how near he was to the loss of the hope of salvation. We know not fully how this change was wrought. All we know concerning it is to be gathered from passages in his later works, in which, as in the 'Convito,' he explains the allegorical significance of some of his poems, or as in the 'Divine Comedy,' he gives poetic form to his experience as it had shaped itself in his imagination. There are often difficulties in the interpretation of his words, nor are all his state-

ments reconcilable with each other in detail. But I believe that in what I have set forth as the course of his life between the death of Beatrice and his exile, I have stated nothing which may not be confirmed by Dante's own testimony.

It is possible that during the latter part of this period Dante wrote the treatise 'On Monarchy,' in which he set forth his views as to the government of mankind. To ascertain the date of its composition is both less easy and less important than in the case of his other long works; because it contains few personal references, and no indications of the immediate conditions under which it was written. But it is of importance not only as an exposition of Dante's political theories and the broad principles upon which those theories rested, but still more as exhibiting his high ideals in regard to the order of society and the government of mankind. Its main doctrine might be called that of ideal Ghibellinism; and though its arguments are often unsound, and based upon fanciful propositions and incorrect analogies, though it exhibits the defects frequent in the reasoning of the time,—a lack of discrimination in regard

to the value of authorities, and no sense of the true nature of evidence,—yet the spirit with which it is animated is so generous, and its object of such importance, that it possesses interest alike as an illustration of Dante's character, and as a monument in the history of political speculation.

Its purpose was, first, to establish the proposition that the empire, or supreme universal temporal monarchy, was necessary for the good order of the world; secondly, that the Roman people had rightfully attained the dignity of this empire; and thirdly, that the authority thus obtained was derived immediately from God, and was not dependent on any earthly agent or vicar of God. The discussion of the first proposition is the most interesting part of the treatise, for it involves the statement of Dante's general conception of the end of government, and of the true political order. His argument begins with the striking assertion that the proper work of the human race, taken as a whole, is to bring into activity all the possibilities of the intelligence, first to the end of speculation, and secondly in the application of speculation to action. He

goes on to declare that this can be achieved only in a state of peace; that peace is only to be secured under the rule of one supreme monarch; that thus the government of the earth is brought into correspondence with the Divine government of the universe; and that only under a universal supreme monarchy can justice be fully established and complete liberty enjoyed. The arguments to maintain these theses are ingenious, and in some instances forcible; but are too abstract, and too disregardful of the actual conditions of society. Dante's loftiness of view, his fine ideal of the possibilities of human life, and his ardent desire to improve its actual conditions, are manifest throughout, and give value to the little book as a treatise of morals beyond that which it possesses as a manual of practical politics.

There is little in the 'De Monarchia' which reflects the heat of the great secular debate between Guelf and Ghibelline; but something of the passion engendered by it finds expression in the opening of the third book, where Dante, after citing the words of the prophet Daniel, "He hath shut the lions' mouths and they have not hurt me,

forasmuch as before him justice was found in me," goes on in substance as follows:—

"The truth concerning the matter which remains to be treated may perchance arouse indignation against me. But since Truth from her changeless throne appeals to me, and Solomon teaches us 'to meditate on truth, and to hate the wicked,' and the philosopher [Aristotle], our instructor in morals, urges us for the sake of truth to disregard what is dear to us, I, taking confidence from the words of Daniel in which the Divine power is declared to be the shield of the defenders of the truth, . . . will enter on the present contest; and by the arm of Him who by his blood delivered us from the power of darkness, I will drive out from the lists the impious and the liar. Wherefore should I fear? since the Spirit, co-eternal with the Father and the Son, says through the mouth of David, 'The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance, he shall not be afraid of evil tidings.'"

These words perhaps justify the inference that the treatise was written before his exile, since after it his experience of calamity would have freed him from the anticipation of further evil from the hostility of those to whom his doctrine might be unacceptable.

But whether or not this be a correct inference, there can be no doubt that the years between the compilation of the 'New Life' and his banishment were years of rapid maturity of his powers, and largely devoted to the studies which made him a master in the field of learning. Keenly observant of the aspects of contemporary life, fasci-

nated by the «immense and magic spectacle of human affairs,» questioning deeply its significance, engaged actively in practical concerns, he ardently sought for the solution of the mysteries and the reconcilement of the confusions of human existence. The way to this solution seemed to lie through philosophy and learning, and in acquiring them he lifted himself above the turmoil of earth. All observation, experience, and acquisition served as material for his poetic and idealizing imagination, wherewith to construct an orderly scheme of the universe; all served for the defining and confirming of his moral judgments; all worked together for the harmonious development of his intellectual powers; all served to prepare him for the work, which, already beginning to shape itself in his mind, was to become the main occupation of the remainder of his life, and to prove one of the abiding monuments of the highest achievements of mankind.

The 'De Monarchia' is written in Latin, and so also is a brief unfinished treatise, the work of some period during his exile, on the Common Speech, 'De Vulgari Eloquio.' It has intrinsic interest as the first critical study of language and of literature in

modern times, as well as from the acute and sound judgments with which it abounds, and from its discussion of the various forms and topics of poetry, but still more from its numerous illustrations of Dante's personal experience and sentiment. Its object is to teach the right use of the common speech; instruction required by all, since all make use of the speech, it being that which all learn from birth, "by imitation and without rule. The other speech, which the Romans called *Grammatica*, is learned by study and according to rule. . . . Of these two the Common is the more noble, because it was the first used by the human race, and also because it is in use over all the world, though in different tongues; and again because it is natural to us while the other is artificial." Speech, Dante declares, is the prerogative of man alone, not required by the angels and not possible for brutes; there was originally but one language, the Hebrew. In treating of this latter topic Dante introduces a personal reference of extraordinary interest in its bearing on his feeling in respect to his exile:—

"It is for those of such debased intelligence that they believe the place of their birth to be the most delightful under the sun, to prefer their own peculiar tongue, and

to believe it was that of Adam. But we whose country is the world, as the sea is for fishes, although we drank of the Arno before we were weaned, and so love Florence that because we loved it we suffer exile unjustly, support our judgment by reason rather than feeling. And though in respect to our pleasure and the repose of our senses, no sweeter place exists on earth than Florence, . . . yet we hold it for certain that there are many more delightful regions and cities than Tuscany and Florence, where I was born and of which I am a citizen, and that many nations and people use a more pleasing and serviceable speech than the Italians."

The conclusion of this speculation is, that the Hebrew, which was the original language spoken by Adam, was preserved by the Hebrew people after the confusion of tongues at the building of the Tower of Babel, and thus became the language used by our Redeemer,— the language not of confusion but of grace.

But the purpose of the present treatise is not to consider all the divers languages even of Europe, but only that of Italy. Yet in Italy alone there is an immense variety of speech, and no one of the varieties is the true Italian language. That true, illustrious, courtly tongue is to be found nowhere in common use, but everywhere in select usage. It is the common speech "freed from rude words, involved constructions, defective pronunciation, and rustic accent; excellent, clear, perfect, urbane, and

elect, as it may be seen in the poems of 'Cino da Pistoia and his friend,'"—that friend being Dante himself. They have attained to the glory of the tongue, and "how glorious truly it renders its servants we ourselves know, who to the sweetness of its glory hold our exile as naught."* This illustrious language, then, is the select Italian tongue, the tongue of the excellent poets in every part of Italy; and how and by whom it is to be used it is the purpose of this treatise to show.

The second book begins with the doctrine that the best speech is appropriate to the best conceptions; but the best conceptions exist only where there is learning and genius, and the best speech is consequently that only of those who possess them, and only the best subjects are worthy of being treated in it. These subjects fall under three heads: that of utility, or safety, which it is the object of arms to secure; that of delight, which is the end of love; that of worthiness, which is attained by virtue. These are the topics of the illustrious poets in the vulgar tongue; and of these, among

* *Literally*, "who by the sweetness of its glory put exile behind our back."

the Italians, Cino da Pistoia has treated of love, and his friend (Dante) of rectitude.

The remainder of the second book is given to the various forms of poetry,—the canzone, the ballata, the sonnet,—and to the rules of versification. The work breaks off unfinished, in the middle of a sentence. There were to have been at least two books more; but, fragment as it is, the treatise is an invaluable document in the illustration of Dante's study of his own art, in its exhibition of his breadth of view, and in its testimony to his own consciousness of his position as the master of his native tongue, and as the poet of righteousness. He failed in his estimate of himself only as it fell short of the truth. He found the common tongue of Italy unformed, unstable, limited in powers of expression. He shaped it not only for his own needs, but for the needs of the Italian race. He developed its latent powers, enlarged its resources, and determined its form. The language as he used it is essentially the language of to-day, —not less so than the language of Shakespeare is the English of our use. In his poetic diction there is little that is not in accord with later usage; and while in prose

the language has become more flexible, its constructions more varied and complex, its rhythm more perfected, his prose style at its best still remains unsurpassed in vigor, in directness, and in simplicity. Changeful from generation to generation as language is, and as Dante recognized it to be, it has not so changed in six hundred years that his tongue has become strange. There is no similar example in any other modern literature. The force of his genius, which thus gave to the form of his work a perpetual contemporaneousness, gave it also to the substance; and though the intellectual convictions of men have changed far more than their language, yet Dante's position as the poet of righteousness remains supreme.

It is surprising that with such a vast and difficult work as the 'Divine Comedy' engaging him, Dante should have found time and strength during his exile for the writing of treatises in prose so considerable as that on the Common Tongue, and the much longer and more important book which he called 'Il Convivio' or 'Il Convito' (The Banquet). It is apparent from various references in the course of the work that it was

at least mainly written between 1307 and 1310. Its design was of large scope. It was to be composed of fifteen parts or treatises; but of these only four were completed, and such is their character both as regards their exhibition of the poet's nature and their exposition of the multifarious topics of philosophy of science, and of morals treated in them, that the student of Dante and of mediæval thought cannot but feel a deep regret at the failure of the poet to carry his undertaking to its intended close. But though the work is imperfect as a whole, each of its four parts is complete and practically independent in itself.

Dante's object in the book was twofold. His opening words are a translation of what Matthew Arnold calls "that buoyant and immortal sentence with which Aristotle begins his Metaphysics,"—"All mankind naturally desire knowledge." But few can attain to what is desired by all, and innumerable are they who live always famished for want of this food. "Oh, blessed are the few who sit at that table where the bread of the angels is eaten, and wretched they who have food in common with the herds." "I,

therefore, who do not sit at the blessed table, but having fled from the pasture of the crowd, gather up at the feet of those who sit at it what falls from them, and through the sweetness I taste in that which little by little I pick up, know the wretched life of those whom I have left behind me, and moved with pity for them, not forgetting myself, have reserved something for these wretched ones." These crumbs were the substance of the banquet which he proposed to spread for them. It was to have fourteen courses, and each of these courses was to have for its principal viand a canzone of which the subject should be Love and Virtue, and the bread served with each course was to be the exposition of these poems,—poems which for want of this exposition lay under the shadow of obscurity, so that by many their beauty was more esteemed than their goodness. They were in appearance mere poems of love, but under this aspect they concealed their true meaning, for the lady of his love was none other than Philosophy herself, and not sensual passion but virtue was their moving cause. The fear of reproach to which this misinterpretation might give

occasion, and the desire to impart teaching which others could not give, were the two motives of his work.

There is much in the method and style of the 'Convito' which in its cumbrous artificiality exhibits an early stage in the exposition of thought in literary form, but Dante's earnestness of purpose is apparent in many passages of manly simplicity, and inspires life into the dry bones of his formal scholasticism. The book is a mingling of biographical narrative, shaped largely by the ideals of the imagination, with expositions of philosophical doctrine, disquisitions on matters of science, and discussion of moral truths. But one controlling purpose runs through all, to help men to attain that knowledge which shall lead them into the paths of righteousness.

For his theory of knowledge is, that it is the natural and innate desire of the soul, as essential to its own perfection in its ultimate union with God. The use of the reason, through which he partakes of the Divine nature, is the true life of man. Its right use in the pursuit of knowledge leads to philosophy, which is, as its name signifies, the love of wisdom, and its end is

the attainment of virtue. It is because of imperfect knowledge that the love of man is turned to fallacious objects of desire, and his reason is perverted. Knowledge, then, is the prime source of good; ignorance, of evil. Through knowledge to wisdom is the true path of the soul in this life on her return to her Maker, to know whom is her native desire, and her perfect beatitude.

In the exposition of these truths in their various relations a multitude of topics of interest are touched upon, and a multitude of opinions expressed which exhibit the character of Dante's mind and the vast extent of the acquisitions by which his studies had enriched it. The intensity of his moral convictions and the firmness of his moral principles are no less striking in the discourse than the nobility of his genius and the breadth of his intellectual view. Limited and erroneous as are many of his scientific conceptions, there is little trace of superstition or bigotry in his opinions; and though his speculations rest on a false conception of the universe, the revolting dogmas of the common mediæval theology in respect to the human and the Divine nature find no place in them. The mingling of fancy with fact,

the unsoundness of the premises from which conclusions are drawn, the errors in belief and in argument, do not affect the main object of his writing, and the 'Convito' may still be read with sympathy and with profit, as a treatise of moral doctrine by a man the loftiness of whose intelligence rose superior to the hampering limitations of his age.

In its general character and in its biographical revelations the 'Banquet' forms a connecting link between the 'New Life' and the 'Divine Comedy.' It is not possible to frame a complete reconciliation between all the statements of the 'Banquet' in respect to Dante's experience after the death of Beatrice, and the narrative of them in the 'New Life'; nor is it necessary, if we allow due place to the poetic and allegoric interpretation of events natural to Dante's genius. In the last part of the 'New Life' he tells of his infidelity to Beatrice, in yielding himself to the attraction of a compassionate lady, in whose sight he found consolation. But the infidelity was of short duration, and, repenting it, he returned with renewed devotion to his only love. In the 'Convito' he tells us that the compassionate lady was no living person, but was the

image of Philosophy, in whose teaching he had found comfort; and the poems which he then wrote and which had the form, and were in the terms of, poems of Love, were properly to be understood as addressed—not to any earthly lady, but—to the lady of the understanding, the most noble and beautiful Philosophy, the daughter of God. And as this image of Philosophy, as the fairest of women, whose eyes and whose smile reveal the joys of Paradise, gradually took clear form, it coalesced with the image of Beatrice herself, she who on earth had been the type to her lover of the beauty of eternal things, and who had revealed to him the Creator in his creature. But now having become one of the blessed in heaven, with a spiritual beauty transcending all earthly charm, she was no longer merely a type of heavenly things, but herself the guide to the knowledge of them, and the divinely commissioned revealer of the wisdom of God. She, looking on the face of God, reflected its light upon him who loved her. She was one with Divine Philosophy, and as such she appears, in living form, in the 'Divine Comedy,' and discloses to her lover the truth which is the native desire

of the soul, and in the attainment of which is beatitude.

It is this conception which forms the bond of union between the 'New Life,' the 'Banquet,' and the 'Divine Comedy,' and not merely as literary compositions but as autobiographical records. Dante's life and his work are not to be regarded apart; they form a single whole, and they possess a dramatic development of unparalleled consistency and unity. The course of the events of his life shaped itself in accordance with an ideal of the imagination, and to this ideal his works correspond. His first writing, in his poems of love and in the story of the 'New Life,' forms as it were the first act of a drama which proceeds from act to act in its presentation of his life, with just proportion and due sequence, to its climax and final scene in the last words of the 'Divine Comedy.' It is as if Fate had foreordained the dramatic unity of his life and work, and impressing her decree upon his imagination, had made him her more or less conscious instrument in its fulfillment.

Had Dante written only his prose treatises and his minor poems, he would still have come down to us as the most commanding

literary figure of the Middle Ages, the first modern with a true literary sense, the writer of love verses whose imagination was at once more delicate and more profound than that of any among the long train of his successors, save Shakespeare alone, and more free from sensual stain then that of Shakespeare; the poet of sweetest strain and fullest control of the resources of his art, the scholar of largest acquisition and of completest mastery over his acquisitions, and the moralist with higher ideals of conduct and more enlightened conceptions of duty than any other of the period to which he belonged. All this he would have been, and this would have secured for him a place among the immortals. But all this has but a comparatively small part in raising him to the station which he actually occupies, and in giving to him the influence which he still exerts. It was in the 'Divine Comedy' that his genius found its full expression, and it is to this supreme poem that all his other work serves as substructure.

The general scheme of this poem seems to have been early formed by him; and its actual composition was the main occupation of his years of exile, and must have been

its main, one might say its sufficient, consolation. Never was a book of wider scope devised by man; and never was one more elaborate in detail, more varied in substance, or more complete in execution. It is unique in the consistency of its form with its spirit. It possesses such organic unity and proportion as to resemble a work of the creative spirit of Nature herself.

The motive which inspired Dante in the 'Divine Comedy' had its source in his sense of the wretchedness of man in this mortal life, owing to the false direction of his desires, through his ignorance and his misuse of his free will, the chief gift of God to him. The only means of rescue from this wretchedness was the exercise by man of his reason, enlightened by the Divine grace, in the guidance of his life. To convince man of this truth, to bring home to him the conviction of the eternal consequences of his conduct in this world, to show him the path of salvation, was Dante's aim. As poet he had received a Divine commission to perform this work. To him the ten talents had been given, and it was for him to put them to the use for which they had been bestowed. It was a consecrated task

to which both heaven and earth set their hand, and a loftier task was never undertaken. It was to be accomplished by expounding the design of God in the creation, by setting forth the material and moral order of the universe and the share of man in that order, and his consequent duty and destiny. This was not to be done in the form of abstract propositions addressed to the understanding, but in a poetic narrative which should appeal to the heart and arouse the imagination; a narrative in which human life should be portrayed as an unbroken spiritual existence, prefiguring in its mortal aspects and experience its immortal destiny. The poem was not to be a mere criticism of life, but a solution of its mystery, an explanation of its meaning, and a guide of its course.

To give force and effect to such a design the narrative must be one of personal experience, so conceived as to be a type of the universal experience of man. The poem was to be an allegory, and in making himself its protagonist Dante assumed a double part. He represents both the individual Dante, the actual man, and that man as the symbol of man in general. His descrip-

tion of his journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise has a literal veracity; and under the letter is the allegory of the conduct and consequences of all human life. The literal meaning and the allegorical are the web and woof of the fabric, in which the separate incidents are interwoven, with twofold thread, in designs of infinite variety, complexity, and beauty.

In the journey through Hell Dante represents himself as guided by Virgil, who has been sent to his aid on the perilous way by Beatrice, incited by the Holy Virgin herself, in her infinite compassion for one who has strayed from the true way in the dark forest of the world. Virgil is the type of the right reason, that reason whose guidance, if followed, leads man to the attainment of the moral virtues, by the practice of which sin may be avoided, but which by themselves are not enough for salvation. These were the virtues of the virtuous heathen, unenlightened by divine revelation. Through the world, of whose evil Hell is the type and fulfillment, reason is the sufficient guide and guard along the perilous paths which man must traverse, exposed to the assaults of sin, sub-

ject to temptation, and compelled to face the very Devil himself. And when at last, worn and wearied by long-continued effort, and repentant of his frequent errors, he has overcome temptation, and entered on a course of purification through suffering and penitence whereby he may obtain forgiveness and struggle upward to the height of moral virtue, reason still suffices to lead him on the difficult ascent, until he reaches the security and the joy of having overcome the world. But now reason no longer is sufficient. Another guide is needed to lead the soul through heavenly paths to the attainment of the divine virtues of faith, hope, and charity, by which the soul is made fit for Paradise. And here Beatrice, the type of theology, or knowledge of the things of God, takes the place of Virgil, and conducts the purified and redeemed soul on its return to its divine source, to the consummation of its desires and its bliss in the vision of God himself.

Such is the general scheme of the poem, in which the order of the universe is displayed and the life of man depicted, in scenes of immense dramatic variety and of unsurpassed imaginative reality. It embraces the whole field of human experience.

Nature, art, the past, the present, learning, philosophy, all contribute to it. The mastery of the poet over all material which can serve him is complete; the force of his controlling imagination corresponds with the depth and intensity of his moral purpose. And herein lies the exceptional character of the poem, as at once a work of art of supreme beauty and a work of didactic morals of supreme significance. Art indeed cannot, if it would, divorce itself from morals. Into every work of art, whether the artist intend it or not, enters a moral element. But in art, beauty does not submit to be subordinated to any other end, and it is the marvel in Dante that while his main intent is didactic, he attains it by a means of art so perfect that only in a few rare passages does beauty fall a sacrifice to doctrine. The 'Divine Comedy' is indeed not less incompatible in its beauty than in its vast compass, the variety of its interest, and in the harmony of its form with its spirit. In his lectures 'On Translating Homer' Mr. Arnold, speaking of the metre of 'Paradise Lost,' says:— "To this metre, as used in the 'Paradise Lost,' our country owes the glory of having produced one of the only two poetical

works in the grand style which are to be found in the modern languages; the 'Divine Comedy' of Dante is the other." But Mr. Arnold does not point out the extraordinary fact, in regard to the style of the 'Divine Comedy,' that this poem stands at the beginning of modern literature, that there was no previous modern standard of style, that the language was molded and the verse invented by Dante; that he did not borrow his style from the ancients, and that when he says to Virgil, "Thou art he from whom I took the fair style that has done me honor," he meant only that he had learned from him the principles of noble and adequate poetic expression. The style of the 'Divine Comedy' is as different from that of the Æneid as it is from that of 'Paradise Lost.'

There are few other works of man, perhaps there is no other, which afford such evidence as the 'Divine Comedy' of uninterrupted consistency of purpose, of sustained vigor of imagination, and of steady force of character controlling alike the vagaries of the poetic temperament, the wavering of human purpose, the fluctuation of human powers, and the untowardness of cir-

cumstance. From beginning to end of this work of many years there is no flagging of energy, no indication of weakness. The shoulders, burdened by a task almost too great for mortal strength, never tremble under their load.

The contrast between the inner and the outer life of Dante is one of the most impressive pictures of human experience; the pain, the privation, the humiliation of outward circumstance so bitter, so prolonged; the joy, the fullness, the exaltation of inward condition so complete, the achievement so great. Above all other poetry the 'Divine Comedy' is the expression of high character, and of a manly nature of surpassing breadth and tenderness of sympathy, of intensity of moral earnestness, and elevation of purpose. One closes the narrative of Dante's life and the study of his works with the conviction that he was not only one of the greatest among poets, but a man whose character gives to his poetry its highest and its most enduring interest.

C. E. Norton.

# ALFRED TENNYSON

BY

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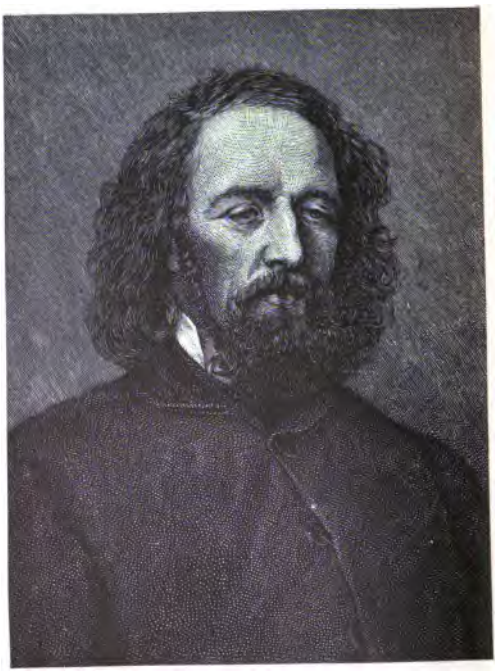

TENNYSON.

# ALFRED TENNYSON

ALFRED TENNYSON, the most representative English poet of the nineteenth century, was born at Somersby, in Lincolnshire, on August 6th, 1809. His boyhood was passed in his father's country rectory, in an atmosphere that was full of poetry and music; and at a very early age he began to try his wings in verse. Some of his youthful efforts were published in partnership with his elder brother Charles, in 1826, in a volume entitled 'Poems by Two Brothers.' Two years later he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, and became a member of an intimate society called "The Apostles," which included some of the most brilliant young men in England. Among them was Arthur Henry Hallam, the closest friend of

Tennyson. In 1829 he won the chancellor's medal with his poem called 'Timbuctoo'; and in the following year he published 'Poems, Chiefly Lyrical,' a slender volume of new and delicate melodies. He left college without taking his degree, soon after his father's death in 1831, and gave himself to a poet's life with a clear resolution which never wavered for sixty years.

His volume of poems published in 1832 marked a distinct growth in strength and skill. It was but a tiny book; but there was a quality in it which more than balanced the lack of quantity. 'The Lady of Shalott,' 'Œnone,' 'The Lotos Eaters,' 'The Palace of Art,' and 'A Dream of Fair Women,' revealed the presence of a true dreamer of dreams, gifted with the magic which translates visions into music. 'The Miller's Daughter,' 'The May Queen,' and 'New Year's Eve,' showed the touch of one who felt the charm of English rural scenery and common life with a sentiment so fresh and pure and deep that he might soon be able to lay his hand upon the very heart of the people.

But before this highest potency of the poet's gift could come to Tennyson, there

was need of a baptism of conflict and sorrow, to purify him from the mere love of art for art's sake, to save him from sinking into an over-dainty weaver of exquisite verse, and to consecrate his genius to the severe and noble service of humanity and truth. This liberating and uplifting experience was enfolded in the profound grief which fell upon him in Arthur Hallam's sudden death at Vienna, in 1833. How deeply this irretrievable loss shook the poet's heart, how closely and how strenuously it forced him to face the mystery and the meaning of life in lonely spiritual wrestling, was fully disclosed, after seventeen years, in the famous elegy, 'In Memoriam.' But the traces of the conflict and some of its fine results were seen even earlier, in the two volumes of 'Poems' which appeared in 1842, as the fruitage of a decade of silence. 'Ulysses,' 'Morte d'Arthur,' 'St. Simeon Stylites,' 'Dora,' 'Locksley Hall,' 'A Vision of Sin,' 'The Two Voices,' and that immortal lyric. 'Break, Break, Break,' were not the work of

«An idle singer of an empty day.»

A new soul had entered into his poetry. His Muse had been born again, from above, He took his place with the master-minstrels

who sing with a full voice out of a full heart, not for a coterie, but for the age and for the race.

It was the recognition that Tennyson really belonged to this higher class of poets, — a recognition which at first was confined to a clear-sighted circle, but spread by degrees to the wider reading public, — that prepared an expectant audience for his first long poem, 'The Princess,' which appeared in 1847. The subject was the eternal woman question, treated in the form of an epic, half heroic and half humorous: the story of a king's daughter who sought to emancipate, and even to separate, her sex from man, by founding a wonderful woman's college; but was conquered at last (or at least modified), by the love of an amorous, chivalrous, dreamy prince, who wooed and married her. The blank verse in which the tale is told has great beauty, though it is often too ornate; the conclusion of the poem is a superb and sonorous tribute to the honor of «das ewig weibliche»: but the little interludes of song which are scattered through the epic shine as the chief jewels in a setting which is not all of pure gold.

In 1850 the long-delayed and nobly labored elegy on the death of Hallam was given to the world. It is hardly too much to say that 'In Memoriam' stands out, in present vision, as the most illustrious poem of the century. Certainly it has been the most frequently translated, the most widely quoted, and the most deeply loved. It is far more than a splendid monument to the memory of a friend. It is an utterance of the imperishable hopes and aspirations of the human soul passing through the valley of the shadow of death. It is a unique group of lyrics, finished each one with an exquisite artist's care, which is only surpassed by the intense and steady passion which fuses them into a single poem. It is the English classic on the love of immortality and the immortality of love.

In the same year with the appearance of this poem happened the two most important events of Tennyson's career. He was married in June to Miss Emily Sellwood, a lady of rare and beautiful endowments, who proved herself, through a long life of unselfish devotion, the true partner of a poet's existence. And he was appointed in November to succeed Wordsworth as poet laureate.

His first official poem was the stately 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington,' in 1852. The majestic march of the verse, its freedom, its organ-toned music, its patriotic vigor, and the lofty solemnity with which it closes, give it a higher place than can be claimed for any other poetical production of an English laureate for a public occasion. 'The Charge of the Light Brigade,' written in 1854, was a trumpet-note that rang through England and echoed around the world.

'Maud' was published in 1855. It is a lyrical monodrama, in which the hero, a sensitive and morbid man, with a hereditary tendency to madness, tells the story of his redemption from misanthropy and despair by the power of a pure love, unhappy but victorious. The variety of the metrical forms in this poem, the passionate tenderness of the love songs, the beautiful truth of the descriptive passages, and the intense personality of its spirit, give it a singular charm, which is felt most deeply perhaps by those who are young and in love. Tennyson himself said to me, «I think 'Maud' is one of my most original poems.»

In 1859 began the publication of the epical sequence called 'Idylls of the King'; the largest, and in some respects the most important, of the works of Tennyson. The first group contained 'Enid,' 'Vivien,' 'Elaine,' and 'Guinevere.' The second group appeared in 1870, and consisted of 'The Coming of Arthur,' 'The Holy Grail,' 'Pelleas and Ettarre,' and 'The Passing of Arthur.' In 1872 'Gareth and Lynette' and 'The Last Tournament' were published; and in 1885 'Balin and Balan' was printed in the volume entitled 'Tiresias and Other Poems.' The division of 'Enid' into two parts—'The Marriage of Geraint' and 'Geraint and Enid'—makes the epic as it now stands consist of twelve idylls. Each of these idylls clothes an ancient legend from the history of King Arthur of Britain, in the richest and most harmonious of modern blank verse. They are so far independent that any one of them might stand alone as a complete poem. But there is a connecting thread running through them all in the threefold love-story of Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot, though the separate pearls often hide the string. The underlying motive of the whole series is to shadow forth

the war of Sense against the Soul. The idylls are to be interpreted therefore as movements in a symphony, the theme of which is the rightful royalty of man's spiritual nature, seeking to establish itself in a settled reign of law, and constantly opposed by the disorderly and disintegrating elements of humanity. In 'The Coming of Arthur' it is doubt that threatens the kingdom; in 'Gareth and Lynette' the conflict is with ambition; in 'The Marriage of Geraint,' with pride; in 'Geraint and Enid,' with jealousy; in 'Balin and Balan,' with suspicion; in 'Merlin and Vivien,' with lust; in 'The Holy Grail,' with superstition; until at last the poison of unlawful love has crept through all the court, and Arthur's Round Table is dissolved in ruin,—but not without a vision of peace for the king who has kept his soul unstained, and a dim promise of new hope for some future age, when he shall return to bloodless victory.

Tennyson has not allowed the ethical purpose of these poems to confuse their interest or bedim their beauty. They are not in any sense an allegory. The tales of love and knight-errantry, of tournament and battle and quest, are vividly told in the true

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romantic spirit, lighting up the olden story with the thoughts and feelings of to-day. There is perhaps a touch of over-elaborateness in the style; but after all the figures stand out to the full as distinctly as they ought to do in such a large tapestry. In the finer idylls, like 'Guinevere' and 'The Passing of Arthur,' the verse moves with a grandeur and dignity, a broad, measured, fluent harmony, unrivaled in England since the days when Milton's organ voice was stilled.

The rest of Tennyson's poetical work includes his dramas,—'Queen Mary,' 'Harold,' 'Becket,' 'The Cup and the Falcon,' and a few others,—and several volumes of miscellaneous poems: 'Enoch Arden' (1864), 'The Lover's Tale' (1879), 'Ballads' (1880), 'Tiresias' (1885), 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After' (1886), 'Demeter' (1889), and 'The Death of Œnone,' published posthumously in 1892. The great age to which his life was prolonged, the unswerving fidelity with which he devoted himself to the sole pursuit of his chosen art, the freshness of spirit which made him delight in labor to the very last, and the fine versatility of mind with which he turned from one field of production to

another,—brought it to pass that both in amount and in variety of work, Tennyson stands in the front rank of English poets. I can think of but two — Shakespeare and Robert Browning — who produced more.

In 1883 a title of nobility was offered to Tennyson through Mr. Gladstone. This honor, which he had declined at least once before, he now accepted; and in January 1884 he was admitted (we can hardly say elevated) to the peerage,—taking his title, Baron of Aldworth and Farringford, from his two country houses, in Sussex and in the Isle of Wight.

It would be difficult, of course, to characterize the style and estimate the value of such a varied and fertile poet in a brief essay. But there are certain qualities in the poetry of Tennyson which are unmistakable and vital.

1. His diction is singularly lucid, smooth, and melodious. He avoids sharp and strident effects. Not only in his choice of metres, but also in his choice of words and cadences, we feel a musical influence controlling his verse. Sometimes this results in a loss of force or definiteness. But it makes his poetry, whether in the long swinging lines

of 'Locksley Hall,' or in the brief, simple measures of the shorter songs, eminently readable. Any one who recites it aloud will find how natural it is to fall, as Tennyson always did, into a rhythmical tone, almost like chanting. And this close relation of his poetry to music may be felt also in the quality of subtle suggestiveness, of intimate and indefinable charm, which makes his brief lyrics as perfect as anything of their kind in the world's literature. He has the power of expressing the vague, delicate, yet potent emotions, the feelings that belong to the twilight of the heart, when the glow of love and the shadow of regret are mingled, in melodies of words as simple and as magical as the chime of far-off bells, or the echoes of a bugle-call dying among the hills.

2. He has an extraordinary truthfulness and delicacy of touch in natural description. This appears equally in minute, pre-Raphaelite work, where he speaks of the color of the buds on different trees in early spring; or of the way in which a wave-crest is reflected in the smooth hollow before it breaks; and in wide, vague landscapes, where he renders the turbulence of the coming storm or the still glory of an autum-

nal morning in a few broad lines. Add to this the quality of blending and interfusing all his epithets and descriptions with the sentiment of the poem, so that they do not distract the feeling but enhance and deepen it, and you have one of the traits by which the poetry of Tennyson is most easily distinguished.

3. His range of imaginative sympathy, as shown in his ballads and character pieces, is very wide; but it moves for the most part along natural and normal rather than strange and eccentric lines. His dramatic lyrics differ in this respect from those of Browning. Tennyson expresses the feeling of the philosopher in 'Lucretius,' of the peasant in 'Rizpah,' of the child in 'The Children's Hospital,' of the old sea-fighter in 'The Revenge,' of the intellectual adventurer in 'Ulysses,' in order to bring out in each, not that which is exceptional and rare, but that which is most deeply human and typical.

4. His work reflects with singular fidelity the scientific and social movements of the age. The discoveries and inventions of modern times are translated into poetic language, and turned to poetic use. In his

verse the earth moves, the planets are molded of star-dust, and the mystery of an unfinished creation is still in evolution. It is possible, often, to assign dates to his poems by an allusion to some newly seen moon or comet, or some critical event in the social history of mankind. It is true that he mistrusts many of the new devices to bring in the millennium. He takes a dark view of some of the elements of nineteenth-century civilization. But still he feels the forward movement of the world; and his poetry mirrors truly the spirit of modern optimism, with shadows.

5. As in its form, so in its spirit, the verse of Tennyson expresses a constant and controlling sense of law and order. He is in the opposite camp from the poets of revolt. Harmony is essential to his conception of beauty. His patriotism is sober, steadfast, thoughtful, law-abiding. His love moves within the bounds of order, purity, and reverence. His conception of power is never akin to blind force, but carries within itself the higher elements of intelligence and voluntary restraint.

"Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,—
These three alone lead life to sovereign power."

6. The poetry of Tennyson is pervaded by a profoundly religious spirit. His view of the world — his view even of the smallest flower that blossoms in the world — is illuminated through and through by his faith in the Divine presence and goodness and beauty. He cannot conceive of a purely physical universe. Nothing that he has written could have been written as it is, if he had been an atheist or an agnostic. Even his poems of doubt and conflict are the resurgent protests of the heart against the cold negations which destroy personal trust in the unseen God, in whom we live and move and have our being. His method in dealing with religious subjects is not theological, like that of Milton or Wordsworth; nor philosophical, like that of Browning or Arnold or Clough. Tennyson speaks more from the side of the feelings, the ultimate spiritual instincts and cravings of humanity. The strongest of these is the desire and hope of a life beyond the grave. To this passion for immortality he gives full play, and it evokes some of the strongest and sweetest tones of his music. From 'The Deserted House' to 'Crossing the Bar,' his poetry is an evidence of his conviction that

death cannot end all. This faith in the life that is to come elevates and purifies his conception of the life that now is. It gives a new meaning to duty and to love. And when we think of the many noble poems in which it has found expression,—'The Two Voices,' 'The May Queen,' 'Locksley Hall,' 'Enoch Arden,' 'The Leper's Bride,' 'Guinevere,' 'In Memoriam,' 'Vastness,' 'Wages,' —we may well call Tennyson the poet of the endless life.

His influence upon the thought and feeling of the age has been far-reaching and potent. He has stood among the doubts and confusions of these latter days, as a witness for the things that are invisible and eternal,—the things that men may forget if they will, but if they forget them, their hearts wither and the springs of poesy run dry. His verse has brought new cheer and courage to the youth of to-day who would fain defend their spiritual heritage against the invasions of materialism. In the vital conflict for the enlargement of faith to embrace the real results of science, he stood forth as a leader. In the great silent reaction of our age from the desperate solitude of a consistent skepticism, his voice was a

clear-toned bell, calling the unwilling exiles of belief to turn again. And when at last, on the 6th of October, 1892, he passed away from his quiet home at Aldworth, with the moonlight falling on closed eyes and voiceless lips, the world mourned for him as for a mighty prophet, and rejoiced for him as a poet who had finished his course and kept the faith.

Henry van Dyke

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